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G/TIP FOR MEGAN HALL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OTRA](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BU](#)

SUBJECT: BULGARIA COUNTRY CLEARANCE FOR MEGAN HALL, OCT.
18-21

REF: STATE 648381

¶1. Embassy Sofia warmly welcomes and grants country clearance for G/TIP Reports Officer for Europe Megan Hall to visit Sofia, Bulgaria, from 18 through 21 October, 2006. Purpose of the visit is to assess recent government efforts to combat human trafficking through discussions with Embassy officers, government officials, and NGO representatives.

¶2. All U.S. visitors require a valid passport to enter Bulgaria. Official and diplomatic passports require visas regardless of length of stay.

¶3. Control Officer for this visit is Political and Economic Affairs Officer Anna Radivilova. Contact information for Ms. Radivilova follows: (Office) 359-2-937-5276, (Fax) 359-2-937-5320, (Cell) 359-887-931-418 and (E-mail) RadivilovaA@state.gov.

¶4. Per Diem for Sofia is USD 151.00 (lodging) and USD 82.00 (M&IE). As requested in reftel, reservation has been made for Ms. Hall at the Grand Hotel Sofia for three consecutive nights with check-in on 18 October and checkout on 21 October. The rate of \$150 / night is for the SD Sofia Deluxe Room and is inclusive of taxes, breakfast, use of fitness facilities and indoor parking. Hotel reservation confirmation number is 48114. The Grand Hotel Sofia will accept payment via US Dollars, Euros, Visa, American Express, Diner's Club, JCB and Master Card. The Grand Hotel Sofia is located at 1 Gurko Street in Sofia and can be reached via (Tel): 359-2-811-0810, (Fax): 359-2-811-0900 and (E-mail) reservations@grandhotelsofia.bg

¶5. The Control Officer and driver will meet passenger at the Sofia airport upon arrival on Wednesday, 18 October at 15:25.

¶6. A draft schedule for meetings and briefings will be sent separately.

¶7. The address of the American Embassy in Sofia is 16 Kozyak Street, 1407 Sofia (in the Lozenetz district). The switchboard telephone number is: 359-2-937-5100, the general fax is: 359-2-937-5320 and, for emergencies, the telephone number for the Marine Security Guard on duty is: 359-2-937-5200.

¶8. If travelers wish to access their State Department e-mail accounts or work on an embassy computer while in Sofia, they need to know their home office exchange server data and domain name in order to establish a temporary account. With this information, Sofia IPC can initiate an account within a few hours after receiving signed request forms once travelers are in Sofia. Please note: While in Sofia, visitors will not be able to log on, or have access to State Department systems and/or intranet without establishing their own

temporary Sofia account.

¶9. Customs declaration requirement: Bulgarian law requires that travelers entering Bulgaria with more than 8,000 Bulgarian Leva (approximately USD \$5,300.00), or the equivalent in foreign currency, travelers checks, gems, gold or silver, must declare the money, checks and/or valuables to customs officials upon arrival. Those entering Bulgaria at Sofia airport with declarable items should use the red ("something to declare") line and not the green ("nothing to declare") line, even if specifically invited into the green line by a customs official. Travelers who do not declare this currency or valuables in excess of 8,000.00 Bulgarian Leva may have their money and property confiscated.

¶10. Sofia currently has a high criminal threat designation. Commercial air travelers should be aware that pilferage of luggage is common at Sofia airport; no valuable items should be included in checked baggage. Embassy recommends using only OK Taxi Company (973-2121), if possible. Other taxis may charge exorbitant rates, both legal and illegal. Pickpockets are especially prevalent in public places and auto theft is increasing.

¶11. Bulgaria is largely a cash economy. Most shops and restaurants still do not accept traveler's checks or credit cards. For expenses, post strongly recommends obtaining dollars in clean new bills; old, torn and defaced bills are often not accepted for exchange. Personal checks can be cashed at the embassy cashier. The embassy has an automatic teller machine on site that works with most American teller cards. Money exchange offers by individuals outside exchange offices or banks should be avoided. Due to pervasive fraud, the use of credit cards is not/not recommended in Bulgaria outside of the top international hotels.

¶12. Telephone rates for all international calls are expensive. A ten-minute call to the United States is approximately USD 40.00 not inclusive of additional hotel surcharge. Travelers may prefer U.S. (or locally purchased) telephone calling cards that offer reduced prices (i.e., MCI cards offer .99 - 1.10 USD/min).

¶13. Medical emergencies can be handled at one or two facilities that are equipped with modern equipment, and an embassy Foreign Service Nurse Practitioner (FSNP) can provide a range of routine services for travelers on government TDY orders. An adequate supply of routinely taken medication should be brought to post since many specialty items are not available.

¶14. Electronic devices: privately owned laptops and personal computers, peripherals, diskettes and tapes are prohibited in the Controlled Access Area (CAA) of the mission. Travelers with USG unclassified and classified laptop or notebook computers, peripherals and diskettes or tapes should review 95 State 244394 (classified machines) and 95 State 243825 (unclassified machines) and notify the regional security office (RSO) before bringing these machines to post. RSO approval must be obtained before any electronic device may be brought into the CAA. Cellular phones are also prohibited in the CAA and must be left outside. Questions concerning other types of electronic devices and magnetic media may be directed to the RSO.

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